

2009 Letters about Literature - Michigan
COMPETITION LEVEL: II (Grades 7-8)

WINNER: Daniel Harrison CITY & SCHOOL: Kalamazoo, Mattawan Middle School

Dear Ben Mikaelson,

About two years ago, I had been a real bully. I used to pick on kids and call them names and not even realize how much of a jerk I was. I had been in trouble a couple times, and ended up in detention. It was there, ironically, where I read your book, *Touching Spirit Bear*. It transformed my life.

Cole was exactly where I was in my life, except maybe not as dramatic. In the beginning of the book, when Cole assaults Peter, I had been going through a similar situation. I didn't care about the people I made fun of at all. But, during that detention after reading your book, I stared up at that pencil-scarred cement wall, I realized who I was, and I hated it. As I got in depth with Cole, I felt like I was reading my soul in your story.

As the end of your book neared, I realized what I needed to do. I vowed that I would be a better person. In chapter eight in your book, Cole taunts the Spirit Bear. The Spirit Bear in my life that I taunted was authority, and it wasn't scared of me one bit. When I tried to show up that authority, the same thing happened to me as with Cole: trouble. A couple days after the whole incident, I dreamed of the sparrows, in their nest, like your book. The dream showed me that I should care, and I started caring for all sorts of things. After that, my life totally turned around, and I'm very grateful for what life has given me.

But as time went by, it came to me how negative I still was. I still felt anger inside me, like Cole did. I had apologized plenty of times before, but somehow, I knew that I never meant it from the heart. I tried one more time, with all of my heart, and asked for forgiveness. Most of those people I bullied forgave me, though I could still feel that missing piece to friendship, but now we're good friends. Being forgiven felt like a wave from Heaven had just hit me.

When I finished your book, I had learned many things about myself. I learned how mean and ignorant I was, and I learned that authority is there to help. A couple months later, the very people who had once been in the position to where they couldn't even stand the sight of me, all went to the movies together with me, and we had an awesome time. I'll never forget the lesson I learned and how much your book changed me. I have truly touched Spirit Bear.

With all my heart,

Daniel Harrison